

09/868978

Atty. Docket #: 1998/F-151

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

INTERNATIONAL APPL. NO.: PCT/EP99/09831 :

INTERNATIONAL FILING DATE: -12/11/1999- :

APPLICANT: TETSU YAMAMOTO :

SERIAL NO: (To be assigned) : ART UNIT:

FILED: -HEREWITH- : EXAMINER:

FOR: "METHOD FOR PRODUCTION
OF
POLYELECTROLYTE MEMBRANES AND
FUEL CELL" :

Commissioner for Patents

Box PCT

Washington, D.C. 20231

"Express Mail" No.: EK954159015

Date: - JUNE 22, 2001 -

I hereby certify that this paper, along with any other paper or fee referred to in this paper as being transmitted herewith, is being deposited with the United States Postal Service "Express Mail Post Office to Addressee" service under 37 CFR 1.10, postage prepaid, on the date indicated above, addressed to the Commissioner for Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231

-Carrie A. McPherson-
(Typed or printed name of mailing paper or fee)

Carrie A. McPherson
(Signature of person mailing paper)

**TRANSMITTAL OF APPLICATION PAPERS
TO U.S. DESIGNATED/ELECTED OFFICE (DO/EO/US)
CONCERNING A FILING UNDER 35 U.S.C. §371
(37 CFR 1.494 OR 1.495)**

This Transmittal Letter is based upon PTO Form 1390 (as revised in May, 1993).

The above-identified applicant(s) (jointly with their assignee) have filed an International Application under the P.C.T. and hereby submit(s) to the United States Designated/Elected Office (DO/EO/US) the following items and other information.

09/868978

JC18 Rec'd PCT/PTO 2 2 JUN 2001

1. ☒ This is a FIRST submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. §371.
2. ☐ This is a SECOND or SUBSEQUENT submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. §371.
3. ☒ This is an express request to begin national examination procedures (35 U.S.C. §371(f)) at any time rather than delay.
4. ☒ A proper Demand for International Preliminary Examination (IPE) was made to the appropriate Authority (IPEA) within the time period required.
5. ☒ A copy of the International Application as filed (35 U.S.C. §371(c)(2)) -- In English
a. ☒ is transmitted herewith (required when not transmitted by International Bureau) -- with Three (3) Sheets of Drawings. See WIPO Publication WO 00/39202.
b. ☐ has been transmitted by the International Bureau.
c. ☐ is not required, as the application was filed in the United States Receiving Office (RO/US).
6. ☒ A (verified) translation of the International Application into the English language is enclosed (See No. 5 above).
7. ☐ Amendments to the (specification and) claims of the International Application under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(3))
a. ☐ are transmitted herewith (required if not transmitted by the International Bureau).
b. ☐ have been transmitted by the International Bureau.
c. ☐ have not been made; however, the time limit for making such amendments has NOT expired.
d. ☐ have not been made and will not be made.
e. ☐ will be submitted with the appropriate surcharge.
8. ☐ A translation of the amendments to the claims (and/or the specification) under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. §371(c)(3)) is enclosed or will be submitted with the appropriate surcharge.

9. ☒ An oath or declaration/power of attorney of the inventor(s) (35 U.S.C. §371(c)[4]) will follow.
☐ and is attached to the translation of (or a copy of) the International Application.
☐ and is attached to the substitute specification.

10. ☒ A translation of at least the Annexes to the IPE Report under PCT Article 36 (35 U.S.C. §371(c)[5]) is enclosed. (5 pages)

Items 11. to 16. below concern other document(s) or information included:

11. ☒ An Information Disclosure Statement under 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98 is enclosed.
 12. ☒ An Assignment for recording and a separate cover sheet in compliance with 37 CFR 3.28 and 3.31 will follow.
 13. ☒ A FIRST preliminary amendment is enclosed.
 A SECOND or SUBSEQUENT preliminary amendment is enclosed.
 14. ☐ A substitute specification (including claims, abstract, drawing) is enclosed.
 15. ☐ A change of power of attorney and/or address letter is enclosed.
 16. ☒ Other items of information:

- ☒ This application is being filed pursuant to 37 CFR 1.494(c) or 1.495(c), and any missing parts will be filed before expiration of—

☐ 22 months from the priority date under 37 CFR 1.494(c), or

☒ 32 months from the priority date under 37 CFR 1.495(c).

- ☒ The undersigned attorney is authorized by the International applicant and by the inventors to enter the National Phase pursuant to 37 CFR 1.494(c) or 1.495(c).

The following additional information relates to the International Application:

International Application No. PCT/EP99/09831

1998/F-151

- ☒ Receiving Office: EPO
☒ IPEA (if filing under 37 CFR 1.495): EPO
☒ Priority Claim(s) (35 USC §§ 119, 365):
Japanese Appln. 10/371554 filed -December 25, 1998-(12/25/98).
☒ A copy of the International Search Report is

☐ enclosed.

☒ attached to the copy of the International
Application.

- ☒ A copy of the Receiving Office Request Form is enclosed.

- [X] PCT/IB/306 (1) sheet
[X] PCT/IB/308 (1) sheet
[X] PTO/SB/05 (1) sheet

The fee calculation is set forth on the next page of this Transmittal Letter.

09/868978

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FEE CALCULATION SHEET

☒ A check in payment of the filing fee, calculated as follows, is attached (37 CFR 1.492).

Basic Fee..... \$ 860.00

Total Number of claims in
excess of (20) times \$18..... -0-

Number of independent claims
in excess of (3) times \$80..... -0-

Fee for multiple dependent
claims \$270..... -0-

TOTAL FILING FEE... \$ 860.00

Kindly send us the official filing receipt.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required or to credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 03-2775. This is a "general authorization" under 37 CFR 1.25(b), except that no automatic debit of the issue upon allowance is authorized. An additional copy of this page is attached.

Respectfully submitted,

By 

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AIP/cam (8577*33)

Enclosures

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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

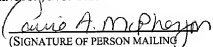
APPLICANT: TETSU YAMAMOTO)
SERIAL NO. TO BE ASSIGNED) ART UNIT: TO BE ASSIGNED
INTERNATIONAL APPL. NO.: PCT/EP99/09831) EXAMINER: TO BE ASSIGNED
INTERNATIONAL FILING DATE: 12/11/1999)
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FOR: METHOD FOR PRODUCTION OF)
POLYELECTROLYTE MEMBRANES)
AND FUEL CELL)

Asst. Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

"EXPRESS MAIL" No. EK954159015 DATE: JUNE 22, 2001

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PAPER OR FEE IS BEING DEPOSITED WITH THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE "EXPRESS MAIL POST OFFICE TO ADDRESSEE" SERVICE UNDER 37 CFR 1.10 ON THE DATE INDICATED AND IS ADDRESSED TO THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20231

CARRIE A. MCPHERSON
(TYPED OR PRINTED NAME OF
PERSON MAILING PAPER OR FEE)


(SIGNATURE OF PERSON MAILING
PAPER OR FEE)

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

Sir:

Prior to fee calculation and examination please amend the above-identified application as follows.

In the Claims

Please cancel claims 3-7.

Please add the following new claims

- 8. The method according to claim 1, wherein the strong acid is phosphoric acid.
9. The method according to claim 2, wherein the strong acid is phosphoric acid.
10. The method according to claim 1, wherein the strong acid is sulfuric acid.

11. The method according to claim 2, wherein the strong acid is sulfuric acid.
12. The method according to claim 1, wherein the strong acid is phosphoric acid having a concentration of not less than 80% by weight.
13. The method according to claim 2, wherein the strong acid is phosphoric acid having a concentration of not less than 80% by weight.
14. The method according to claim 1, wherein the basic polymer is selected from the group consisting of polybenzimidazole, polypyridine, polypyrimidine polyimidazole, polybenzthiazole, polybenzoxazole, polyoxadiazole, polyquinoline, polyquinoxaline, polythiadiazole, polytetrazapyrene, polyoxazole, polythiazole, polyvinylpyridine, polyvinylimidazole, and polybenzimidazole.
15. The method according to claim 2, wherein the basic polymer is selected from the group consisting of polybenzimidazole, polypyridine, polypyrimidine polyimidazole, polybenzthiazole, polybenzoxazole, polyoxadiazole, polyquinoline, polyquinoxaline, polythiadiazole, polytetrazapyrene, polyoxazole, polythiazole, polyvinylpyridine, polyvinylimidazole, and polybenzimidazole.
16. The method as claimed in claim 15, wherein the temperature is 35°C or above and the immersion is 1 hour or less.
17. The process as claimed in claim 11, wherein said temperature is 50°C or above and the immersion time is 30 minutes or less.
18. The process as claimed in claim 12, wherein said temperature is 50°C or above and the immersion time is 30 minutes or less.
19. The method according to claim 17, wherein said temperature is from 50°C to 200°C.
20. A fuel cell comprising a plurality of cells, wherein the cell is provided with a polyelectrolyte

membrane produced by the method according to claim 1, and with a pair of electrodes sandwiching the polyelectrolyte membrane. - -

REMARKS

The applicants respectfully request that the preliminary amendment be entered prior to fee calculation and examination. Support for newly added claims 8-15 can be found in the original claims 2-6. Support for newly added claims 16-19 can be found in the specification at page 3, lines 21-36. Support for newly added claim 20 can be found in the original claim 7. No additional fee is required for the extra claims.

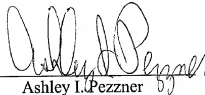
If there are any additional fees due in connection with the filing of this response, the Commissioner is authorized to charge or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 03-2775.

A prompt and favorable action is solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

CONNOLLY BOVE LODGE & HUTZ LLP

By



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METHOD
FOR
PRODUCTION
OF
POLYELECTROLYTE
MEMBRANES
AND FUEL CELL

Tetsu Yamamoto

ENGLISH FILING
OF

INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION

PCT/EP99/09831 IFD: 12/11/1999

-with-

Three (3) Sheets of Drawings

1998/F-151 (8577*33)

"Express Mail" mailing label
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Date of Deposit

- JUNE 22, 2001 -

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- Carrie A. McPherson -

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09868978-092401

Method for production of polyelectrolyte membranes and fuel cell

Background of the invention

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a method for the production of a polyelectrolyte membrane and to a fuel cell.

2. Related Art

A fuel cell has an electrolyte and a pair of electrodes separated by the electrolyte. In a fuel cell, a fuel such as hydrogen is supplied to one electrode, and an oxidizing agent such as oxygen is supplied to the other electrode. This will convert the chemical energy involving oxidation of the fuel to electric energy. Hydrogen ion (i.e., proton) permeates through the electrolyte while the reaction gases (i.e., hydrogen and oxygen) does not permeate through the electrolyte. Typically, a fuel-cell stack has a plurality of fuel cells, and each of the cells has an electrolyte and a pair of electrodes separated by the electrolyte.

As electrolytes for fuel cells, solids such as polyelectrolyte membranes or liquids such as phosphoric acid are used. Among these, the polyelectrolyte membranes have received attention as the electrolytes for fuel cells in recent years. For example, perfluorosulfonic acid polymers and complexes between basic polymers and strong acids are used as materials for the polyelectrolyte membranes.

The perfluorosulfonic acid polymer, typically, has a structure in which the side chain having a sulfonic acid group (e.g., a side chain having a sulfonic acid group bound to a perfluoroalkylene group) is bound to a perfluorocarbon skeleton (e.g., a copolymer of tetrafluoroethylene and trifluorovinyl). Since the sulfonic acid group can turn into an anion through the dissociation of its hydrogen ion, it shows proton conductivity.

The polyelectrolyte membranes comprising complexes of basic polymers and strong acids have been developed. In International Publication WO96/13872 and its equivalent U.S. Pat. No. 5,525,436, there is disclosed a method for producing a proton conductive polyelectrolyte membrane by immersing a basic polymer such as a polybenzimidazole in a strong acid such as phosphoric acid or sulfuric acid. The fuel cell employing such a polyelectrolyte membrane has the advantage that it can be operated at 100 °C or above.

In *J. Electrochem. Soc.*, Vol. 142, No. 7, 1995, ppL121-L123, it is described that when a polybenzimidazole is immersed in 11M phosphoric acid for at least 16 h,

the polybenzimidazole will be impregnated with five molecules of phosphoric acid per unit.

Further, in International Publication WO97/37396 and its equivalent U.S. Pat. No. 5,716,727, there is described a method for producing a polyelectrolyte membrane by obtaining a solution of polybenzimidazole dissolved in trifluoroacetic acid, next by adding phosphoric acid to the solution, and subsequently by removing the solvent.

All the disclosures of WO96/13872, *J. Electrochem. Soc.*, Vol. 142, No. 7, 1995, ppL121-L123, and WO97/37396 are incorporated into the present specification by reference.

Where the complexes between basic polymers and strong acids are to be put into practical use as the polyelectrolyte membranes for fuel cells, further improvements on their proton conduction are needed.

In addition, where such polyelectrolyte membranes are manufactured, it is required from the standpoint of their production process that the times of immersion of the basic polymers in the strong acids be brief. In *J. Electrochem. Soc.*, Vol. 142, No. 7, 1995, ppL121-L123, a polybenzimidazole is immersed in phosphoric acid for at least 16 h. This is too time-consuming and the production process will prove to be inefficient.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention provides a method for producing a polyelectrolyte membrane, comprising the step of:

immersing a basic polymer in a strong acid having a concentration sufficient to impregnate the basic polymer with six or more strong acid molecules per polymer repeating unit of the basic polymer at a temperature of not less than 35 °C for a period of 5 h or less.

In the invention, the time of immersion is preferably 1 h or less.

Preferably, the strong acid is phosphoric acid; or alternatively, the strong acid is preferably sulfuric acid. It is further preferred that the strong acid be phosphoric acid having a concentration of not less than 80% by weight.

Preferably, the basic polymer is selected from the group consisting of polybenzimidazoles, polypyridines, polypyrimidines, polyimidazoles, polybenzthiazoles, polybenzoxazoles, polyoxadiazoles, polyquinolines, polyquinoxalines, polythiadiazoles, polytetrazapirenes, polyoxazoles, polythiazoles, polyvinylpyridines, polyvinylimidazoles, and polybenzimidazoles.

This invention provides a fuel cell comprising a plurality of cells, wherein each of the cells is provided with a polyelectrolyte membrane produced by the method described above and a pair of electrodes sandwiching the polyelectrolyte membrane.

In this invention, the immersion time can be shortened to 5 h or less by setting the temperature to 35 °C or above at the time when the basic polymer is immersed in the strong acid. Accordingly, the production process can be made more efficient.

A large quantity of the strong acid can be allowed to impregnate the basic polymer, specifically at the ratio of six or more strong acid molecules per polymer repeating unit of the basic polymer, by adjusting the concentration of the strong acid. Accordingly, the proton conduction of the polyelectrolyte membranes can be improved and the output of fuel cells can be enhanced.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional illustration of the fuel cell.

FIG. 2 is an enlarged cross section of "A" in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a plot illustrative of the correlation between the concentrations of phosphoric acid and the numbers of phosphoric acid molecules per polymer repeating unit of a polybenzimidazole.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

This invention includes the step of immersing a basic polymer in a strong acid of a predetermined concentration at a temperature of not less than 30 °C for a period of 5 h or less. By carrying out the immersion step at 30 °C or above, it becomes possible to shorten the time needed to immerse the basic polymer in the strong acid: specifically, the time has turned out to be 5 h or less.

The immersion step is to be carried out preferably at 35 °C or above, more preferably at 40 °C or above, in particular preferably at 50°C or above. As the temperature of the immersion step increases, the immersion times can be further shortened.

Thus, by raising the immersion temperature, the immersion time can be made 1 h or less, and can even be made 30 min or less. Shortening the immersion times improves the efficiency of the production process.

However, because the stability of the basic polymers and the safety precautions required to handle the strong acids at high temperatures should be taken into consideration, the immersion step is to be carried out at 200 °C or below, more preferably at 100 °C or below, and most preferably at 80 °C or below.

This invention includes the step of immersing the basic polymer in the strong acid having a concentration sufficient to impregnate the basic polymer with six or more strong acid molecules per polymer repeating unit of the basic polymer. As the concentration of the strong acid increases, the basic polymer can be impregnated with more strong acid. Thus, the impregnation quantity of the strong acid increases; and it improves the proton conduction of a complex between the basic polymer and the strong acid. When the basic polymers are used as the electrolyte membranes for fuel cells, the output of the fuel cells will be enhanced.

It is preferred that the strong acid be in a concentration sufficient to impregnate the basic polymer with eight or more strong acid molecules per polymer repeating unit of the basic polymer. Further, it is more preferred that the concentration be enough to impregnate the basic polymer with nine or more strong acid molecules per polymer repeating unit of the basic polymer.

In WO96/13872 and WO97/37396, a dopant level of not less than 200 molar per cent and that of not less than 300 molar per cent are disclosed, respectively. The former level corresponds to two or more strong acid molecules being present per polymer repeating unit of a basic polymer, and the latter level to three or more strong acid molecules, respectively.

Protic strong acids are used as the strong acid; for example, phosphoric acid and sulfuric acid are preferably used.

As used in the present specification, the "phosphoric acid" includes phosphorous acid (H_3PO_3), orthophosphoric acid (H_3PO_4), pyrophosphoric acid ($\text{H}_4\text{P}_2\text{O}_7$), triphosphoric acid ($\text{H}_5\text{P}_3\text{O}_{10}$), and metaphosphoric acid. The phosphoric acid, particularly orthophosphoric acid, has a concentration of not less than 80% by weight preferably; more preferably, a concentration of not less than 85% by weight; even more preferably, a concentration of not less than 90% by weight; and most preferably, a concentration of not less than 95% by weight. This is because the basic polymer can be impregnated with a larger number of strong acid molecules as the concentration of the strong acid increases.

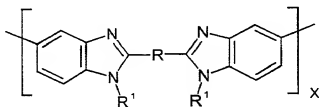
In this invention, the strong acid may be heated to a predetermined temperature, and then, the basic polymer may be immersed in the heated strong acid. Preferably, the basic polymer that has been shaped into a membrane form is immersed in the strong acid. For example, the basic polymer may be shaped into the membrane form following to the doctor blade method.

Alternatively, the basic polymer may be shaped into the membrane form according to the method as described in Japanese Patent Appln. Hei 10-125560, filed May 8, 1998; entitled "Method for Producing Polyelectrolyte Membranes and

Fuel Cells." Specifically, a liquid medium containing not less than 1% by weight of a basic polymer and a solvent having a boiling point or an azeotropic point of from 60°C to 220°C is poured into a cylinder the inner circumference of which has a cylindrical configuration; next, the cylinder is rotated. At that point, the solvent is allowed to evaporate through centrifugation by the rotation; concurrently, a polyelectrolyte membrane having a cylindrical form of almost uniform thickness is formed on the inner circumference of the cylinder. Thereafter, the polyelectrolyte membrane having a cylindrical form is cut out to yield a polyelectrolyte membrane having a film form. This method permits the basic polymer to shape into a uniform matrix within its polyelectrolyte membrane. The disclosure of Japanese Patent Appln. Hei 10-125560 is incorporated into the present specification by reference.

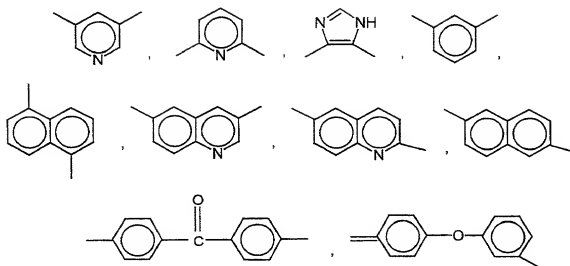
In this invention, basic polymers are used. Such basic polymers include polybenzimidazoles, polypyridines, polypyrimidines, polyimidazoles, polybenzthiazoles, polybenzoxazoles, polyoxadiazoles, polyquinolines, polyquinoxalines, polythiadiazoles, polytetrazapyrenes, polyoxazoles, polythiazoles, polyvinylpyridines, polyvinylimidazoles, polybenzimidazoles, etc. Among these, polybenzimidazoles are preferred. The basic polymers described in WO96/13872 are also preferably used.

As the polybenzimidazoles, preferably usable are, for example, those of the following formula:



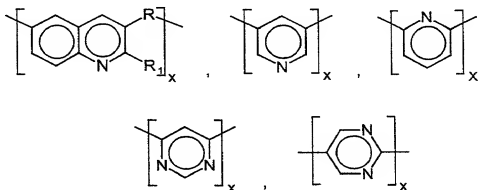
wherein R represents alkylene, perfluoroalkylene, or a substituent of any of the following formulae:

6



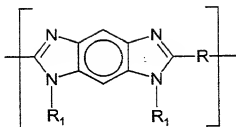
further wherein each of alkylene and perfluoroalkylene groups, which may be R, has from 1 to 10 carbons preferably, and more preferably from 1 to 6 carbons, and still further wherein R¹ may be the same or different and represents hydrogen, alkyl or phenyl, wherein the alkyl preferably has from 1 to 6 carbons and is optionally substituted with halogen, sulfone, or the like.

The basic polymers which may also be used are represented by the following formula:



wherein R and R¹ are as previously defined.

Furthermore, the basic polymers which may also be used are polybenzobisimidazoles of the following formula:



wherein R and R¹ are as previously above.

The polyelectrolytes obtained by this invention, viz. the complexes between the basic polymers and the strong acids, are proton conductive; therefore, they can preferably be used as the electrolytes for cells. Nevertheless, the polyelectrolytes are not be limited to be of use for cells; but they can also be used as the electrolytes for display elements, electrochromic elements or various sensors.

According to another aspect of this invention, the polyelectrolyte membranes can preferably be used in the cells for fuel cells.

In FIG. 1, a cell 10 of a fuel cell is provided with an electrolyte membrane 12 and a pair of electrodes 20 sandwiching the electrolyte membrane 12. The electrode 20 is provided with a catalyst layer 14 conducting electrode reaction and with a gas diffusion layer 22 for supplying the catalyst layer 14 with a reaction gas.

In FIG. 2, the catalyst layer 14 is provided with a matrix 15 comprising an electrolyte membrane and with two or more catalyst particles 16 dispersed in the matrix. The matrix 15, together with the electrolyte membrane 12, forms a hydrogen ion-conducting channel. Preferably, the material for the matrix 15 is identical to the material for the electrolyte membrane 12. However, these materials may be different from each other. The matrix 15 may be porous so that the reaction gas can pass through. The catalyst particles 16 are preferably in contact with each other: this forms an electron-conducting channel.

Each of the catalyst particles 16 is provided with a conductive carrier 17 and a catalyst substance 18 supported on the surface of the conductive carrier 17. For example, particles comprising carbon are used as the conductive carrier 17. Simple substance of platinum, alloys of platinum, and the like are used as the catalyst substance 18. In FIG. 2 the catalyst substance 18 coats the surface of the conductive carrier 17, but it may be in a particulate form.

The gas diffusion layer 22 is porous so that the reaction gas can be allowed to diffuse. In FIG. 2 the gas diffusion layer 22 comprises two or more conductive particles 26 that form a gap 24. For example, particles comprising carbon are used as the conductive particles 26, and may be the same as the conductive carrier 17.

Conductive substances such as carbon fiber may be used in place of the conductive particles 26.

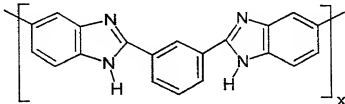
The polyelectrolytes of this invention can be used as the electrolyte membrane 12. Thus a cell precursor having the electrolyte membrane 12 and either or both of the catalyst layers 14 can also be prepared. Moreover, a cell can then be produced by fixing the gas diffusion layer 22 to such a precursor.

EXAMPLES

The following examples are merely illustrative of this invention, and are not to be construed as limitations thereof.

Reference Example

Polybenzimidazole having the structural formula described below and having an intrinsic viscosity of 1.1 (available from Hoechst Celanese Inc.) was dissolved in N,N-dimethylacetamide to yield a solution having a resin concentration of 5.0% by weight.



This solution, 83g, was poured into a tubular cylinder made of stainless steel (141 mm in inner diameter and 408 mm long), and it was rotated at 1100 rpm and at 90 °C for 2 h to yield a polybenzimidazole membrane in a cylindrical form. When the thickness of the resulting polybenzimidazole membrane was measured at arbitrary 6 points, its mean membrane thickness was 30.2 μm ; the deviations of the maximum value of measurement and the minimum value of measurement from the mean membrane thickness are within 1 μm .

EXAMPLE 1

This polybenzimidazole was impregnated with orthophosphoric acid. The polybenzimidazole membrane (30 μm thick) was cut out in 3-cm square pieces. The films were washed with water to wash away the remaining N,N-dimethylacetamide. Then, they were dried at reduced pressure and the weights of the films were measured.

Thereafter, the dried polybenzimidazole films were placed in sample vials. To these was added each 30 ml of 85% by weight aqueous orthophosphoric acid, and immersion was carried out at temperatures and for periods of time as listed in Table

1. After lapses of the predetermined times, the polybenzimidazole films impregnated with orthophosphoric acid were removed from the phosphoric acid and excess phosphoric acid on their surfaces was thoroughly wiped off with filter papers. Subsequently, the weight increments were determined by weighing. After weighing, the polybenzimidazole films were placed in 1-l volumetric flasks, and deionized water was filled up to the measuring lines and stirred. Orthophosphoric acid was extracted from the polybenzimidazole films to obtain aqueous phosphoric acid solutions. The aqueous phosphoric acid solutions thus obtained were titrated with 0.02 N sodium hydroxide solution, and the quantities of orthophosphoric acid having impregnated the polybenzimidazole films were determined. The difference between the weight increment after impregnation with orthophosphoric acid and the weight of orthophosphoric acid of impregnation was calculated to be the quantity of the water that had been adsorbed to each polybenzimidazole film impregnated with orthophosphoric acid. These results are shown in Table 1.

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Table 1

Sample	Temperature (°C) of phosphoric acid	immersion time	dried weight of PBI film (g)	film weight after impreg- nation with phosphoric acid (g)	impregnation quantity of phosphoric acid (g)	quantity of adsorbed water (g)	number of phosphoric acid molecules of impregnation per polymer repeating unit	number of adsorbed water molecules per polymer repeating unit
1	50	5 min	0.0692	0.3739	0.2017	0.088	9.58	21.69
2	50	10 min	0.0692	0.3739	0.2217	0.088	10.08	18.52
3	50	30 min	0.0720	0.3744	0.2181	0.084	9.53	19.22
4	40	15 min	0.0812	0.4309	0.2524	0.097	9.78	20.55
5	40	20 min	0.0713	0.3770	0.2181	0.088	9.62	21.07
6	40	30 min	0.0741	0.3772	0.2181	0.085	9.26	19.66
7	40	55 min	0.0698	0.3598	0.2107	0.079	9.49	19.44
8	40	5 h	0.0711	0.3874	0.2279	0.088	10.09	21.33
9	23	1 h	0.0722	0.3285	0.1911	0.065	8.33	15.47
10	23	2 h	0.0745	0.3902	0.2328	0.083	9.83	19.08
11	23	3 h	0.0701	0.3688	0.2156	0.083	9.68	20.32
12	23	5 h	0.0707	0.3689	0.2106	0.088	9.38	21.24
13	23	24 h	0.0581	0.3281	0.1960	0.074	10.61	21.79

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From Table 1, it is understood that the use of 85% by weight orthophosphoric acid at 40 °C can remarkably shorten the time during which the impregnation quantity of orthophosphoric acid reaches its equilibrium. Especially, impregnation at 50 °C can shorten the immersion times to approximately one hundredth of the 16 h in a known method.

EXAMPLE 2

According to the method of Example 1, the impregnation of orthophosphoric acid was carried out at 23 °C for 24 h by varying the concentration of orthophosphoric acid within 50-85% by weight. Thus, the relationship between the impregnation quantities of phosphoric acid and the phosphoric acid concentrations was examined. These results are shown in Table 2 and FIG. 3.

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Table 2

Phosphoric acid concentration (% by weight)	Dried weight of PBI film (g)	film weight after Impregnation with phosphoric acid (g)	Impregnation quantity of phosphoric acid (g)	quantity of adsorbed water (g)	number of phosphoric acid molecules of impregnation per polymer repeating unit	number of adsorbed water molecules per polymer repeating unit
85	0.0581	0.3281	0.196	0.07396	10.61	21.79
80	0.0590	0.2457	0.137	0.04952	7.32	14.39
70	0.0609	0.2006	0.108	0.03192	5.57	8.98
60	0.0604	0.1724	0.086	0.0257	4.49	7.30
50	0.0587	0.1511	0.072	0.0206	3.85	6.00

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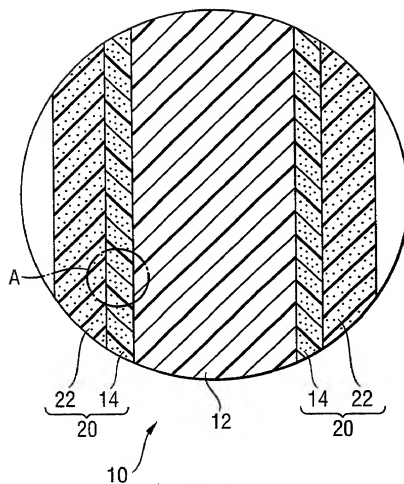
From Table 2, it is understood that the higher the concentration of orthophosphoric acid is, the greater the impregnation quantity of phosphoric acid in the polybenzimidazole becomes. This correlation holds not only at room temperature, but also under warming at 40 ° and 50 °C.

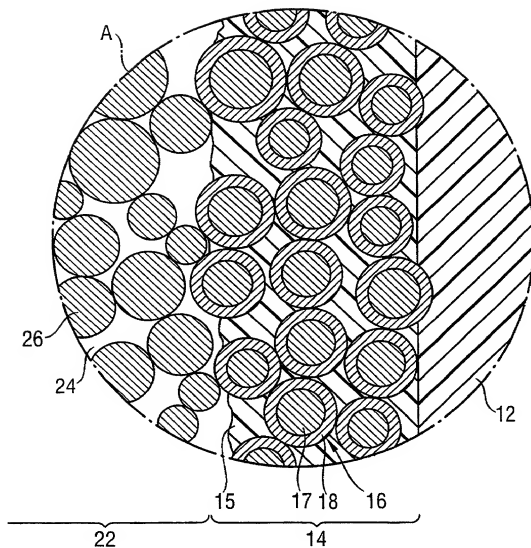
EXAMPLE 3

A polybenzimidazole membrane having a thickness of 50 μm was produced according to the method of Reference Example. This polybenzimidazole membrane was immersed in 85% by weight phosphoric acid at 40 °C for 1 h to yield a polyelectrolyte membrane. This polyelectrolyte membrane was cut out in a circular piece of 7-cm diameter. Next, it was sandwiched by two sheets of carbon electrodes for a fuel cell of the polyelectrolyte type, which were commercially available, and hotpressed to yield a cell for fuel battery. When hydrogen and air were introduced into this cell and electricity was generated, a very high output of was obtained: 350 mW/ cm^2 at 160 °C and 0.5 V under 1 atmosphere, and 650 mW/ cm^2 at 160 °C and 0.5 V under 3 atmospheres, respectively.

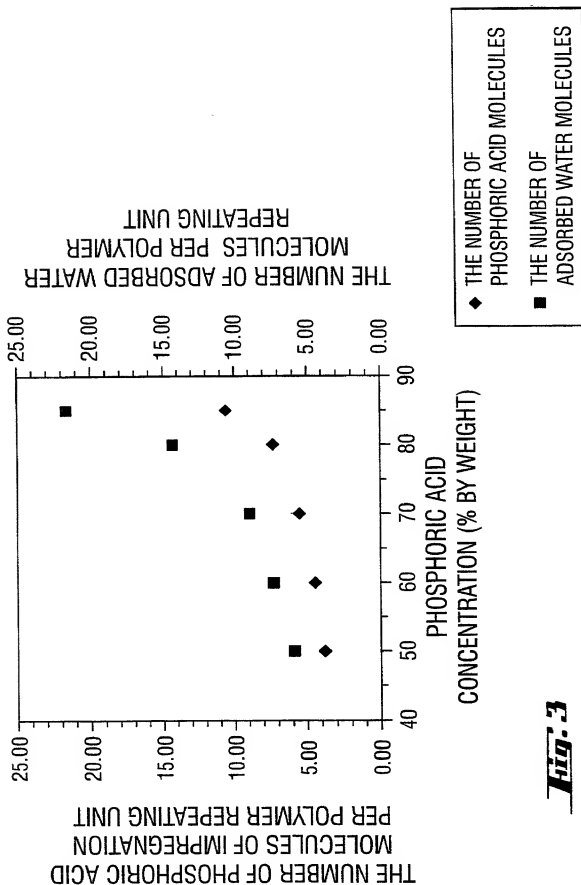
CLAIMS

1. A method for producing a polyelectrolyte membrane, comprising the step
of:
5 immersing a basic polymer in a strong acid having a concentration
sufficient to impregnate the basic polymer with six or more strong acid molecules per
polymer repeating unit of the basic polymer at a temperature of not less than 30 °C
for a period of 5 h or less.
- 10 2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the immersion time is 1 hour or
less.
3. The method according to claim 1 or claim 2 , wherein the strong acid is
phosphoric acid.
- 15 4. The method according to claim 1 or claim 2 , wherein the strong acid is
sulfuric acid.
- 20 5. The method according to claim 1 or claim 2 , wherein the strong acid is
phosphoric acid having a concentration of not less than 80% by weight.
- 25 6. The method according to claim 1 or claim 2 , wherein the basic polymer is
selected from the group consisting of polybenzimidazoles, polypyridines,
polypyrimidines polyimidazoles, polybenzthiazoles, polybenzoxazoles,
polyoxadiazoles, polyquinolines, polyquinoxalines, polythiadiazoles,
polytetrazapyrenes, polyoxazoles, polythiazoles, polyvinylpyridines,
polyvinylimidazoles, and polybenzimidazoles.
- 30 7. A fuel cell comprising a plurality of cells, wherein the cell is provided with a
polyelectrolyte membrane produced by the method according to any of claims 1-6
and with a pair of electrodes sandwiching the polyelectrolyte membrane.

***Fig. 1***

**Fig. 2**

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**Fig. 3**

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I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

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Date: June 13, 2007 ^{JPL}

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